Tragic Clowns/Male Comedians: Wyndham Lewis’s ‘Enemy of the Stars’ and Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot

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I

A number of scholars have recognised that points of contact exist between Lewis’s Enemy of the Stars (1914) and Beckett’s Waiting for Godot (1954). However, this recognition has gone no further than brief discussion. In this essay I shall make an extended analysis of the textual parallels that exist between these two ‘performances’, in an attempt to demonstrate that Beckett follows a path previously travelled by Lewis.

The impact of Lewis on Beckett’s work has not been sufficiently recognised because the former projected himself as a fierce enemy of Joyce, and because Beckett was, for a time, Joyce’s disciple. The young Beckett arrived in Paris in November 1928, and was introduced by Thomas MacGreevey to Joyce’s circle of friends. Beckett soon felt, in James Knowlson’s words, that it was ‘essential for him to separate himself and establish a distance between himself as a writer and Joyce.’ Beckett became fascinated by ‘the avant-garde literature, painting and theatre’ of Paris in this period, and soon shared in ‘the thrilling atmosphere of experiment and innovation’ that surrounded the avant-garde. Beckett’s own career as a writer began when Charles Prentice, senior partner at Chatto and Windus, published his study of Proust and later accepted More Pricks than Kicks (1933). Knowlson remarks that for a time, in common with Wyndham Lewis, Beckett became ‘a good friend of Prentice.’ When in London, the playwright dined with Prentice in his ‘lodging in Earl’s Terrace, Kensington, in a chaos of books, boxes of cigars, wines and pictures by Wyndham Lewis’. It was at this time that Beckett became familiar with Lewis’s writing and his aesthetic interests. For example, the MacGreevey correspondence at Trinity College, Dublin shows that Beckett read The Apes of God soon after it was published in 1930. Beckett acknowledged reading Blasting and Bombardiering, and reviewers in the late 1930s detected affinities between More Pricks than Kicks and Lewis’s work.

I shall argue here that Enemy of the Stars sets a precedent for many of the aesthetic forms and situations that Beckett (re)creates in Waiting for Godot. This is not to claim ‘influence’, but to identify shared purposes. Lewis’s play is a revolutionary Vorticist performance aimed at undermining the traditional concepts of time and space, and at disrupting pre-formed views of reality and the linguistic forms that embody them. Enemy of the Stars constitutes a cross-generic text that incorporates some conventions of drama (and of narration), has abstract pictorial characteristics, and is yet perhaps intended for stage performance.

The Enemy conceives this performance—whether in the mind or upon the boards—as a timeless event because he believes that when the artist shares in the institutional apparatus he loses his integrity and becomes a puppet controlled by the social construction of reality. Under these conditions aesthetic technique cannot be relied upon to achieve ‘the real’ with any certainty. In Arghol’s performance ‘Self’ is detached from traditional external constraints in the same moment that Lewis attempts to create a distinct work of modern art. Enemy of the Stars constitutes a classical—and indeed a poetic—image that reaches towards the eternal essence of neo-classical art. To carry out this task, Lewis the artist immerses himself in the figure of Arghol and sets up a struggle with the ‘liberal’ mass incarnated by his alter ego Hanp, and by the audience, which is viewed as complicit with Hanp. Arghol performs in this way because he
considers that the latter are responsible both for the fragmentation of the self, and for all that is rotten in the modern world. This is why Arghol and Hanp are not traditional characters, but the embodiment of conflicting psychological states. Upon the stage they act out, in continuous quarrel, their metaphysical desolation, using a language in which Lewis tries to shape a new reality by means of an indirect non-mimetic use of words. This is why Enemy of the Stars lacks both traditional plot and temporal and spatial co-ordinates, and is written in fragmented syntactical and grammatical structures. By means of these peculiar anti-theatrical forms, Lewis tries to make the internally-divided Arghol use not action but the energy of his mind to express the real condition of modern man in the world. The purpose is to reach creative autonomy outside environmental causality, and to transcend reality. Enemy of the Stars was meant to be not only a new impulse in art, but a new means of understanding life as well.

Enemy of the Stars and Waiting for Godot meet in their shared aesthetic rebellion against the institutional machinery (including literary conventions) of their respective times. In my view, the Irish playwright recycles some of the structural devices and thematic motifs of Lewis’s play in his own work, whether knowingly or not. Accordingly, Beckett adopts the structural device of two complementary male comedians who were once artists. This pair subverts traditional dramatic forms, and reinforces anti-mimetic purposes by introducing philosophic considerations. The outcome is a tragicomic representation of the dilemmas of the late modernist artist. Waiting For Godot emerges as a unique drama, yet also as a re-reading of Enemy of the Stars.⁷

II

It is Bakhtin’s work on the function, in fiction, of the rogue, the clown and the fool that illuminates the varied thematic connections that exist between these two plays.⁸ The paired characters originate in the figure of the clown of classical antiquity and of the ancient Orient. Here, tragicomic masked figures execute a system of contradictions and opposed modes of being that in Asia and the West will persist as the folklore that pre-exists class society. In the Middle Ages, this clownish figure creates around himself his own special world (Bakhtin calls it the chronotope). The masked clown is connected with the theatrical trappings of the public square, performing in front of the common people. This clown eventually acquires a metaphorical meaning. His existence is an imitation or pastiche of the mode of being of some Other. Although masked, and yet because he is masked, he sees the falseness of every situation. Because he does not belong to this world, he possesses normative values special to himself. He has the right to misunderstand conventions, to confuse and tease, and to exaggerate life. Because his speech is privileged (so that he may parody others, yet retain the right not to be taken literally), this masked clown represents ‘the other’ or ‘others’ on the stage of the public square, where he performs life as a comedy, and treats those others as fellow actors. His entire function is to externalise human behaviour by means of laughter. Laughing at himself and at others, this clown exposes all that is vulgar and stereotyped in human relationships, raging at his public, making them see life in its crudest reality. The outcome is that ideological constructions and human relationships are revealed as false, whilst real life is recognised as being crude and bestial.

From the masks of antiquity through to the clowns of the Middle Ages there develops the next stage, the Zanni and Arlecchini of the commedia dell’arte, emerging from the theatrical aspects of Carnival. Kristeva posits that the festive laughter of these carnivalesque occasions negates the deadening official culture of the Middle Ages whilst at the same time asserting its own life and giving vitality to it.⁹ In this regard, what Lewis and Beckett do in their plays is to carry out a carnivalesque and subversive negation of the official culture of their time. To achieve this, paired male comedians are made to enact repetitive tragicomic situations on the stage using non-linguistic forms.¹⁰ Folk art and music hall songs also have their relevance to Enemy of the
Stars and Waiting for Godot. Because of their comic yet serious character, one does not contemplate such songs, but suffer them. These clowns’ detached position permits them to situate their art as one of contemplation rather than of action. In sustaining this position, these popular artists direct their assaults upon the snobs and the ignorant masses, revealing the excesses perpetrated by the former over the latter.

To dramatise this contradictory situation, both Lewis and Beckett draw upon the dream motif present in the nineteenth century German Romantic writers Goethe and Hoffman, Dostoevsky’s ‘poor folk’, together with the theme of the double that is found so frequently in his work, merges with this dream motif to concentrate in a single staged moment the greatest possible diversity of human conflict. Lewis’s drama is compatible with his Expressionistic predecessors, whilst both he and Beckett bring their paired characters into symbolic relationships enacting strange and distorted relationships of love and hatred that exist somewhere on the verge between dream and reality—in the world, that is, of Surrealism. On the stage, these split selves interact to represent human diversity. In doing so they establish the essential contradictionaryness of human identity. The argument is staged in an eternal present, yet penetrates deeply into actual social relationships, and concludes in despair at the absence of any solution. These coexisting pairs engage with the world in terms of space rather than time, and in doing so raise the possibility that causality and the given might be overcome.

Despite their esoteric origins, these paired comedians also embody, or defend, a popular idea of culture. In Enemy of the Stars, Arghol is the masked artist figure in constant struggle with the mass, whilst Beckett’s Vladimir is the clown pitted against the audience, and stands for mankind as a whole. The individualism of Arghol and Vladimir has at its core the requirement that the conscious self be created through continuous opposition to the Other (Hapn and Estragon, respectively), and to the public. The independent status of Arghol and Vladimir is the necessary mark of the artist; the comic element incarnated in the figure of the clown, the prerequisite of artistic revelation and redemption. In this regard, the relationship of conflict that exists between both the individual and his own self, and between humankind and nature in these two works represents the relationship subsisting between society and the modern world.

The fact that these pairs are male and not female is not a matter of writerly taste, but constitutes an important structural device based on a long historical literary tradition which carries a powerful ideological and anti-feminist charge. That the wheelwright’s yard where Arghol appears for the first time should be described as a ‘rough Eden of one soul, to whom another man and not EVE would be mated’ (emphasis in original) is by no means arbitrary. Lewis’s pair is masculine because he identifies the feminine with the ignorant, vulgar and utilitarian mass that threatens Arghol’s artistic integrity throughout Enemy of the Stars. As regards Waiting for Godot, Knowlson records that, in the context of giving permission for performances by women’s acting companies in the 1980s, Beckett made it plain that he conceived its interpreters to be ‘distinctively male’, not female: ‘Women don’t have prostates’. It is difficult to decide if these male pairs parody the roles of married couples; they depend upon each other, yet they are always in conflict. Whether this describes the married state or not, it is certainly a case of ‘Nec tecum nec sine te’.

III

Enemy of the Stars opens by referring the reader to a non-existent synopsis from an imaginary programme note. This is followed by a page headed ‘Advertisement’ that describes, in unusual and imaginatively charged language, the play’s setting and the dress of the two main characters, Arghol and Hapn. This page ends with the words ‘VERY WELL ACTED BY YOU AND ME’.
(55) In the same moment as Lewis indicates that he is working outside the conventions of the printed play, he introduces the theme of reciprocity. A page headed 'Enemy of the Stars' presents more on the two principals who will embody this reciprocal action, but stresses their psychology rather than their appearance. An account of stage arrangements is followed by a page headed 'Argol' (a typographic error) that describes his relationship to the universe around him. Only now does the action begin, before an audience who have been charged for seeing the spectacle: 'THE BOX OFFICE RECEIPTS HAVE BEEN ENORMOUS'. (61) The subsequent text is divided into sections rather than acts, and consists of a narrative rather than the usual presentation of speeches for actors. The traditional functions of dramatic scenes and stage asides are present, but the many references to the location and to the silences, gestures and movements of the two principal characters must be understood primarily as narrative. As Graver rightly says, *Enemy of the Stars* is not 'conceived as the text of a play that might be performed but as a performance in itself.'

These peculiar dramatic devices are located somewhere between convention and innovation. Similarly, *Waiting for Godot* fails to respect the traditional theatrical conventions of time, space and subject matter, whilst it deals with the same thematic motifs that structure *Enemy of the Stars*. The threatening notion of time, the tragicomic suffering of the human being, and the ridiculous comedy of minds trapped irrevocably within the treacherous body, are themes that the plays have in common. Further, both insist that language cannot ensure a reliable account of reality, and both rely upon a self-conscious use of staging to convey these characteristically modernist concerns. Whilst it is the case that these two works are distinct as regards tone and style, they share many features in terms of structure and subject matter. *Enemy of the Stars* is a narrative performance rather than a conventional drama; when the conventions are used, they occur in an acutely self-aware manner. The formal differences between this work and *Waiting for Godot* are not distinctions that separate them, but instances of the particular strategies which each writer used as the vehicle of experiment and innovation in his own time.

The setting of *Enemy of the Stars* is a wheelwright’s yard somewhere ‘NOWADAYS, ON THE UPPER BALTIC’ (55); that of *Waiting for Godot* is a country road by a tree in the evening. Lewis and Beckett bring to the scene the spirit of the trappings of the public square of the Middle Ages, where masked comedians used to carry out a mocking rebellion against official systems of thought. For this reason, these two barely civilised settings are inhabited by male pairs estranged from the social, who identify with the world of the circus, the pantomime and the music hall. This is the setting in Lewis:

THE SCENE.
SOME BLEAK CIRCUS, UNCOVERED, CAREFULLY CHOSEN, VIVID NIGHT.
IT IS PACKED WITH POSTERITY (*ES 55*)

These are the circumstances in Beckett:

VLADIMIR: Charming evening we’re having. [...]  
ESTRAGON: It’s awful.  
VLADIMIR: Worse than the pantomime.  
ESTRAGON: The circus.  
VLADIMIR: The music hall.  
ESTRAGON: The circus. (*WG 34-35*)

The clowns on stage structure a relationship with their audience. The implication of ‘VERY WELL ACTED BY YOU AND ME’ is that the performance dramatizes a universal situation. The audience is the whole of humanity, named ‘POSTERITY’, which is ‘SILENT AND
EXPECTANT...LIKE THE DEAD, AND MORE PATHETIC' (55), because its future is bleak. The comic actors in Godot remind their public that it too is somehow present in the performance and that their destiny is similarly gloomy. This is why they make their listeners observe their unsavoury behaviour and dismal relationships:

Vladimir: To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not....Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! (WG 79)

Lewis’s masks behave with similar absurd violence because the stars, which are embodiments of time and fate, constitute a constant ‘exterior attack’ upon them. (67) For Arghol, the stars are as dangerous a threat as habit and routine because they threaten to denigrate and humiliate Hanp and himself. In Godot, habit and routine constitute similar ‘great deadener[s]’. (91) A shared physical and psychological degradation can be seen in the following passages. First, Lewis:

The process and condition of life, without any exception, is a grotesque degradation, and ‘soulilure’ of the original solitude of the soul. There is no help for it, since each gesture and word partakes of it, and the child has already covered himself with mire. (ES 70)

Next, Beckett:

Pozzo: (suddenly furious). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It’s abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we’ll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (WG 89)

Lewis’s Arghol complains because his uncle enslaves him and Hanp by making them overwork in the wheelwright’s yard. The irrational desire for power of the human animal is said to be ‘illimitable’ (66), something that not even an artist like Arghol can undermine. He is outside civilization, yet ‘the will of the universe (time) [is] manifested with directness and persistence’ as well. This is why Hanp asks:

‘Can’t you kill him, in the name of God? A man has his hands, little else. Mote and speck, the universe illimitable!’ Hanp gibed. ‘It is true he is a speck, but all men are. To you he is immense.’

They sat, two grubby shadows, unvaccinated as yet by the moon’s lymph, sickened by the immense vague infections of night.

‘That is absurd. I have explained to you. Here I get routine, the will of the universe manifested with directness and persistence. Figures of persecution are accidents or adventures for some....That would not be of the faintest use in my case.’ (ES 66)

However, life is so routine, and external forces so powerful that rebelling against them is ‘of the faintest use in [Arghol’s] case’; an idea that Vladimir conveys throughout Godot, but in different terms:

Vladimir: We wait. We are bored. (He throws up his hand.) No, don’t protest, we are bored to death, there’s no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let’s get to work! (He advances towards the heap, stops in his stride.) In an instant all will vanish and we’ll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness! (WG 81)

This is a clown aware that there is nothing he can enact against the passage of time, death and extinction. Moreover, he and Estragon will always be at the mercy of attack from outside.
As Vladimir says ‘Don’t leave me! They’ll kill me!’ (81) Consequently both pairs feel lethargic, desolate, so that the contemplation of suicide becomes an aspect of each performance. Lewis:

Men have a loathsome deformity called Self; affliction got through indiscriminate rubbing against their fellows: Social ex crescence. Their being is regulated by exigencies of this affliction. Only one operation can cure it: the suicide’s knife. Or an immense snuffling or taciturn parasite, become necessary to victim, like abortive poodle, all nerves, vice and dissatisfaction. I have smashed it against me, but it still writhes, turbulent mess. (ES 71)

Beckett:

VLADIMIR: Let’s wait and see what he says.
ESTRAGON: Who?
VLADIMIR: Godot.
ESTRAGON: Good idea.
VLADIMIR: Let’s wait till we know exactly how we stand. (WG 17-18)

Yet none of them commits suicide. Whilst Arghol acknowledges the futility of trying to undermine all the external factors that act to restrain his ‘self’, he is yet determined to attain individuality as a creative mind. Vladimir and Estragon, on the other hand, are also aware of the nullity of their efforts to achieve perfection, though they hope that a so-called ‘Godot’ will help them to accomplish this task. Both Lewis and Beckett represent the desire to transcend a desolating metaphysical condition as a struggle to triumph over time, habit and external attack; but they do so by exploiting different aesthetic terms. Nonetheless, these formal differences do not invalidate a thematic continuity manifest in both works: the impossibility of arriving at a zone of creative consciousness outside temporal and spatial bonds at the level of discourse without using traditional forms of language. The remainder of this paper describes the forms in which these pairs are made to spend their time trying to achieve such goals.

Arghol appears in the wheelwright’s yard and sits down. Then Hanp calls to him, from a hut, his voice interpreted by the narrator: ‘It was like a child’s voice hunting its mother’. (63) Suddenly, a boot batters Arghol’s right hand and the narrator describes how each blow of the stars (here is the external attack) causes this mask such enormous pain that he loses consciousness. Hanp seems to want to aid Arghol, but he roughly stirs him with his foot and insults him instead: ‘come, you fool, and have supper’. (65) Hanp walks back to the hut, leaving Arghol behind:

Arghol lies, hands clasped round his knees. This new kick has put him into a childish lethargy. He gets to his feet soon, and walks to hut. He puts his hand on Hanp’s shoulder, who has been watching him, and kisses him on the cheek.

Hanp shakes him off with fury and passes inside hut. (ES 65)

This situation is proleptic of many of the situations that Vladimir and Estragon enact so repetitively in Godot. This male pair, joined in a kind of mother-child relationship, spend their time complaining about the painful effects of time whilst sitting down and standing up, repetitively, in a similarly strange place. Moreover, a boot batters Estragon, driving him also to lethargy. Vladimir tries to assist him, but just as Arghol seeks reinforcement from Hanp without much success, so Estragon actually refuses the help of Vladimir:

Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again.
As before.

Enter Vladimir.

ESTRAGON: (giving up again). Nothing to be done. [...] 
VLADIMIR: Get up till I embrace you. 
ESTRAGON: (irritably.) Not now, not now. [...] 
VLADIMIR: And they didn’t beat you. 
ESTRAGON: Beat me? Certainly, they beat me. 
VLADIMIR: The same lot as usual. 
ESTRAGON: The same? I don’t know. (WG 9)

Both pairs show the alienating effects of the passage of time, external abuse and social constraints in absurdist terms. Apart from this thematic continuity, the passage from Godot exploits the same dramatic conventions that are apparent in the following passage from Enemy of the Stars. Both express the metaphysical desolation in non-linguistic terms, that is, by means of silence, repetitive movement and gesture:

They ate their supper at the door of the hut. An hour passed in wandering spacious silence.

‘Was it bad to-night?’ a fierce and railing question often repeated.

Arghol lay silent, his hands a thick shell fitting back of head, his face grey vegetable cave. (ES, 65; emphasis added)

Performative repetition both induces laughter and signifies symbolically the tragic implications of the human inability to achieve self-conscious knowledge.

These comic pairs rely upon habit and routine to give them the impression that they really exist. As Arghol says, ‘To leave violently slow monotonous life is to take header into the boiling starry cold. [...] You cling to any object, dig your nails in earth, not to drop into it’. (67) This is what Vladimir and Estragon do throughout Waiting for Godot. Both Lewis and Beckett insist that the human being constantly needs to resort to habit, or else search out new kinds of entertainment in order not to acknowledge how painful filling in the time is, particularly when external forces constantly threaten one’s integrity.

Self...is the one piece of property all communities have agreed it is illegal to possess. [...] 

When mankind cannot overcome a personality, it has an immemorial way out of the difficulty. It becomes it. It imitates and assimilates that Ego until it is no longer one....This is success. (ES 66)

Arghol is fearful of becoming an undifferentiated self among the mass. This is why he begins to avoid contact with Hanp.

Energy has been fixed on me from nowhere—heavy and astonished: resigned. Or is it for remote sin! I will use it, anyway, as prisoner his bowl or sheet for escape; not as means of idle humiliation. (ES 68; emphasis added)
It is the energy of his mind that Arghol intends to use as a ‘prisoner [uses] his bowl…for escape’. Vladimir and Estragon often entertain a comparable strategy in order to escape from life imprisonment in order to enjoy a fictional existence as creative minds. Playing with their hats, they build up on stage a new temporal life:

 Estragon: One knows what to expect.
 Vladimir: No further need to worry.
 Estragon: Simply wait.
 Vladimir: We’re used to it.

*He picks up his hat, looks inside it, shakes it, puts it on* (WG 38; emphasis added).

The hat joins the bowl and the sheet as an efficacious object.

As the meaning of objects emerges, a distinct difference begins to open out at the level of form. As Scott Klein points out, ‘Lewis cannot escape the demands of the word and its related structures of syntax and narrative.' In its first publication in Blast, Lewis the artist conceives his text as a pictorial performance in design, but within the text itself he feels compelled to introduce representative elements such as the narrator and narrative form. Furthermore, though in some sense written for the stage, Lewis cannot have intended that *Enemy of the Stars* be performed (though it has been, in a production directed by Simon Usher in London during the 1980s). Despite this, the play resists at a formal level the effort to shape the metaphysical situation of the modern self.

Arghol is this self. At the beginning of his encounter with Hanp he posits a life based on pure contemplation. As the drama evolves, he becomes aware of two facts: that he is tied to Hanp, and that he has been playing a ‘liberal’ role in life without knowing it. As Arghol says: ‘I talk to you for an hour and get more disgusted with myself.’ Frustrated by the nullification of his own attempted generosity, he is led to reject Hanp, and eventually sets up a violent struggle with him: ‘You are an unclean little beast, crept gloomily out of my ego. You are the world, brother, with its family objections to me.’ (73) Arghol breaks his vow of autonomy when he projects his hatred upon his disciple Hanp and eventually succumbs to the violent practices of his fellow man. As a result, Arghol has to accept that he has a body, although initially he refused to do so. Later, Arghol has dreams in which he projects his fears upon the philosopher Max Stirner, and upon his old friends as well. At the level of the public self, Arghol has to admit that he has defended Stirner’s concept of the supremacy of the ego in the past, and that he was an intellectual of the same kind as his old friends early in his life. In rejecting these things, Arghol comes to despise what he now represents.

But Hanp, who is equally tied to Arghol, feels that he has been divested of his identity and suffered a lifetime of betrayal. That is why he plans revenge upon his master by stabbing him. When he does so, Arghol (mind) suffers the revenge not only of his servant Hanp (body), but also the revenge of the mass, and all the ideals he had defended in the past. After the crime, Hanp sees the figure of Arghol as a ‘projection’ of his fears. Unable to cope with this situation, Hanp’s body sinks clumsily into the canal. His suicide demonstrates that he needs Arghol, the mind, as much as the latter needed him.

Beckett creates a similar situation in *Waiting for Godot*, where Pozzo fears that Lucky will abandon him: ‘I don’t like it. I’ve never known him refuse a bone before. *He looks anxiously at Lucky.*) Nice business it’d be if he fell sick on me!’ (27) For this reason, Pozzo finally admits that he is dependent upon Lucky and the rest of mankind to assert his self-identity, even though he has spent a lifetime castigating them:

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POZZO: Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes) even when the likeness is an imperfect one. (WG 24)

At the end of their performance, the condition of Pozzo and Lucky has deteriorated significantly, for the former is now blind and the latter deaf. Pozzo makes use of Lucky, attaching himself to him by means of a cord that links their ailing bodies in a way that cannot but appear both tragic and comic. In sum, neither Arghol and Hanp nor Pozzo and Lucky achieves autonomy as creative minds capable of functioning outside environmental causality and temporal bonds. However, it is from the experience of the latter pair that Vladimir and Estragon learn the following lesson: by building up a life of one’s own as mere cogito, it is possible to create one’s own fictional existence as a creative mind for a while, transcend the mystery and terror of one’s human condition in the world, and destroy the external restrictions imposed upon the self in that world. This is the reason why Beckett’s clownish pair spend their time on the stage contemplating suffering, thinking, playing with the few objects they possess (hats, carrots and boots), and waiting for Godot. In doing so, Vladimir and Estragon arrive at a zone of creative consciousness beyond the level of discourse, and consequently achieve ‘the impression that [they really] exist’. (69) In other words, they build up a life of their own in a fictitious world, whilst destroying the traditional functions of language on the stage. The verbal absurdity of the dialogues in which they engage undermines their determined status in this world. As Federman rightly says, Vladimir and Estragon ‘become genuine creators of fiction’. Each member of the pair decides his own end while performing on stage, something that constitutes a reflexive ‘affirmation of being’. The fiction that each creates is his own story.

IV

In Enemy of the Stars, Lewis (an early modernist) does not accomplish the task of shaping the metaphysical situation of the modern self, as artist, at either the formal or thematic level. However, he sets up a motif that allows Beckett (a late modernist) to re-take or repeat aspects of Enemy of the Stars in order to conceive one of modernism’s most innovative pieces of theatre. Beckett makes his pair attain the full consciousness of being on the stage through self-conscious forms and minimalist dramatic devices. In this regard, he dispenses with language as a valid means of expressing intuitions about reality, and thus his aesthetics of failure is a complete success.

There is no evidence for the direct influence of Lewis on Beckett, but judging by the textual data that have just been analysed, Beckett’s play nevertheless stands in a significant relation to Lewis’s at the level of new dramatic forms and thematic motifs. For this reason, this study of the connection between Enemy of the Stars and Waiting for Godot certainly rests on a basis of affinity and on a broad intertextual relationship. Perhaps this affinity is coincidental, but it is doubtfully one of direct influence. Lewis and Beckett have a total commitment to writing as an art and adopt the artist-figure as a lone outsider battling against tradition and convention. Both consider language inadequate to shape the dilemmas of existence. This is why they consistently experiment with new dramatic forms of a spatial nature. As we have seen, the methods of approach differ to a certain extent—but no single author has a monopoly of thought. However, it is the Enemy who sets new paths of dramatic aesthetic practice in Enemy of the Stars, and Beckett who completes Lewis’s modernist task, making his public re-read and reinterpret earlier literary patterns and traditions in a new light. Part of the enormous success of Waiting for Godot can be accounted for by its capacity to re-read and re-write the textual past, and then to present that reinterpretation to the audience in fresh dramatic terms.
NOTES

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1. Henceforth ES and WG.


3. By this date, Blast I and Vorticism had set new directions for later modernist movements, and Joyce had published Dubliners, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Ulysses, and some poems that Beckett admired deeply. Joyce asked Beckett to do some research for ‘Work in Progress’, and Beckett’s essay ‘Dante...Bruno, Vico...Joyce’ constitutes his contribution to the making of Finnegans Wake. In this sense, Joyce played a crucial role in the early years of Beckett’s formation. Many passages in his Dream of Fair to Middling Women show evidence of this. See also James Knowlson, The Authorized Biography: Damned to Fame, The Life of Samuel Beckett (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), pp. 106-7.


5. I am grateful to James Knowlson for this information.


7. The thematic relation examined here would be further supported by an examination of the ways in which both Lewis and Beckett were influenced by the philosophical writings of Descartes, Berkeley, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Bergson and Hulme, among others. These affinities will be the subject of a later article.


9. Alan Munton and Martin Esslin agree in finding the origins of these pairs within the traditions just described. Keith Tuma cites the analysis of Lewis’s fascination with popular culture given by Alan Munton and Bernard Lafourcade, adding that Enemy of the Stars stands for an example of avant-garde work pitted against the official idea of serious art. See Julia


